

# Republican State Senators Tour Plants

by Ellen Carney

Twelve Idaho Republican senators met for breakfast at the Cedar View Supper Club in Soda Springs Friday as guests of Monsanto Company and Kerr-McGee Company, and then toured the two chemical plants.

The group was welcomed by Soda Springs Mayor Kirk Hansen, who said the City of Soda Springs was happy for the industry in the area and for their good industrial neighbors.

Hansen told the group that the results of the recent radionuclide study of the area were insignificant.

"The very worst scenario, could possibly lead to one more cancer death in Soda Springs over the next 10 years, Caribou County is number 44 in cancer deaths—less than any other county in the

state," he added.

Hansen commended the industrial people and said while "struggling for our lives against federal mandates, we count on our state senators for help."

The breakfast was followed by a tour of Kerr-McGee's Soda Springs chemical plant, where vanadium is extracted from Monsanto's waste products, and eight different intermediate products produced. The waste products from Kerr-McGee's plant are then sold to Evergreen Resources to make fertilizer products.

Bob Griffin, plant manager, told the group the plant, which is one of three vanadium processors in the United States and the only OSHA Star Site in the West, was expanding, constructing, and employing more people.

He said Idaho's laws were suitable for the industry, and personnel were well trained and had a higher work ethic than he had seen in any other place, but more money needed to be spent in the Bureau of Environmental Controls to hire engineers who understand the processes.

"There is a certain window of time when an opportunity is available and if you have to wait three years for a permit, you will miss that window of opportunity," he added.

Griffin said Montana had a first class system since hiring engineers in that capacity.

Senator Laird Noh said there had been a lot of discussion in the last legislative session about hiring private contractors to clean up the backlog in that department.

"The problem with that is an engineer does that job and then is gone. He's not there the next time I apply for a permit and I have to start all over with someone new," suggested Griffin.

Griffin also said Idaho is one of the few states where a permit is necessary to construct equipment to remove pollutants, and this caused delays in improving the environment. He said special consent orders were a burden on the agency.

The group then toured Monsanto Company's plant, where Plant Manager Mike McCullough told senators the plant produces 29 percent of the total U.S. production of elemental phosphorus and has a \$21 million annual payroll. It is one of the top three plants in the industry in safety, and a leader in environmental control, he told the group.

McCullough explained the plant is on the Superfund potential list because in the early '80s they found a tank leak with the potential of affecting groundwater.

"We spent several million dollars on our remedial program," he said. "We messed up, but we have fixed the problem, but the model doesn't allow for any judgement levels," he added.

He said they had surveyed the whole plant, dug 60 wells to check groundwater and improved the water to better than regular drinking water standards.

"Our philosophy is not to do what the law requires, but to set a higher requirement than the law requires. The philosophy from our corporate headquarters is for an environmental soundness and high social responsibility," he said. "We are under attack continually to prove we can operate in a responsible manner."

McCullough said the move to pull phosphates (or phosphorus) out of detergents was a long range threat to the industry.

After a tour of the plant, the senators were taken on a tour of Monsanto's Henry mine, where they enjoyed a barbecue lunch.

**COMMENTS:** Contaminated was also from the SX Pond. I have written to the Idaho Water Resources asking for a copy of all wells drilled or water applications, they tell me they don't have to give reports on industrial sites. Why then can't I drill a well without getting a permit from the water resources. Degerstrom, Inc. had to apply for a permit and have it advertised for two weeks to allow the citizens to protest.

These extra wells could cause mixing of upper and lower aquifers and dry up our aquifer.